COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

Sort function a real time-saver

Many businesses already use WordPerfect, the popular word processing program for personal computers. In fact, it remains the No. 1 best-seller despite stiff competition from the likes of MicroSoft Word and WordStar.

Yet, while users may extol the virtues of WordPerfect's powerful spellchecker, thesaurus and math features, it has another feature that's a real time-saver. It's the sort function.

This hidden and unusual feature lets you sort by line, paragraph or "merge records." Merge records are names and address records that you may

Segal

wish to merge with letters or other documents. You can even select specific items such as the "key" to sort the entire batch.

For example, if you have a file containing hundreds of names and addresses, you can specify any field or part of a field for sorting: last name, state, city or zip code on an active or inactive field. You can also designate if you want the records sorted in an ascending or descending order.

Here's how to use it:

✔ First, isolate the text to be sorted by creating a file that contains only that text. If you want to sort a portion of a larger document, first block the portion, then copy the block to a new file and proceed to use the sort function. Use Alt-F4 to block the text and Ctrl-F4 to copy it to another file. Then, after the sort is finished, you can copy the sorted text back into the original document by following the same procedure.

✔ To activate the sort function press Ctrl-F9. A prompt says, "Input file to sort: (Screen)." Let's assume you are only sorting what's on your screen. Simply press Return. Another prompt saying, "Output file to sort: (Screen)" will appear. Press Return again.

✔ The Sort Menu will now fill up half your screen with options to choose from. The program needs to know what words or numbers it should look for to organize the sort. These are called keys in the menu. You can also use menu categories to tell the program where the key is located in your text.

For example, you might want to sort name and address records alphabetically based on the key "last name." The sort function will recognize three types of sorts: line, paragraph or merge documents. You simply select the one you want.

Next, you specify on the Sort Menu where your key is located in your records. Usually, the "last name" is located in Field 1, on Line 1 and at Word 2. Your sort will be in ascending order by default, or you can tell the menu to reverse the order.

Finally, you select the "perform action" option on the Sort Menu and it goes to work. It's exceptionally fast — small sorts take a few seconds, and larger sorts with thousands of records may take only five minutes.

While data bases typically do sorting, it's convenient to have such a function available within a word processing program. At first, you may not think you need this capability, but you'll be surprised how often you'll end up using it.

The bottom line: WordPerfect's powerful sort capacity is another good reason to buy the program for business use.

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